Unit .01

Session .06

Suffering and God's Presence

Scripture

Job 1:6-12,20-22; 9:14-16,32-35

6 One day the sons of God came to present themselves
before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. **7** The
LORD asked Satan, "Where have you come from?"
"From roaming through the earth," Satan answered
him, "and walking around on it." **8** Then the LORD
said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job?
No one else on earth is like him, a man of perfect
integrity, who fears God and turns away from evil."
9 Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for
nothing? **10** Haven't you placed a hedge around him,
his household, and everything he owns? You have
blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have
increased in the land. **11** But stretch out your hand
and strike everything he owns, and he will surely curse
you to your face."
12 "Very well," the LORD told Satan, "everything he
owns is in your power. However, do not lay a hand
on Job himself." So Satan left the LORD's presence. …
20 Then Job stood up, tore his robe, and shaved his
head. He fell to the ground and worshiped, **21** saying:
Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I
will leave this life. The LORD gives, and the LORD takes
away. Blessed be the name of the LORD. **22** Throughout
all this Job did not sin or blame God for anything.
… **14** How then can I answer him or choose my
arguments against him? **15** Even if I were in the right,
I could not answer. I could only beg my Judge for
mercy. **16** If I summoned him and he answered me, I
do not believe he would pay attention to what I said.…
32 For he is not a man like me, that I can answer him,
that we can take each other to court. **33** There is no
mediator between us, to lay his hand on both of us.
34 Let him take his rod away from me so his terror
will no longer frighten me. **35** Then I would speak and
not fear him. But that is not the case; I am on my own.

Intro Options

Main Point:
God draws near to comfort us when we suffer.

Option 1

Here's the thing: Everyone suffers. Every single person on this planet experiences hurt, loss, stress, and struggle. No one is exempt. Suffering comes in all shapes and sizes from natural disasters, to wars and extreme violence, down to the everyday things in our lives like the reality of broken families and broken hearts. Think about the most common headlines today.

- **What headlines stuck out to you recently?**
- **How have you experienced suffering in your own life lately?**

When bad things happen in the world or around us, we all have one question: Why? Although Job's story doesn't necessarily answer that question, it does show how a righteous man dealt with suffering and how he trusted God despite what he experienced. Job didn't understand his suffering at the time, and most often, we don't either. But, just like with Job, our suffering can still be used as a part of God's plan.

Option 2

Bring in some items you value (if you don't want to transport the item or if you would like to talk about a person, consider brining a photo). Make sure the items vary in monetary and sentimental value. Describe to students the value and worth of each item. As you walk through each description, tell students how easy or difficult it would be for you to lose or sell that item.

- **What items could you easily sell? What items would be more difficult for you to sell? Why?**
- **Would it be easier to let go of an item with a greater price value or sentimental (personal) value?**

It's never easy to get rid of something you feel is worth keeping, and it's never easy to lose something you want to keep either. We have all lost something (or someone) we value. Job, the main character in today's passage, lost a lot. But in his suffering, Job found comfort in God. His example helps us see how to do the same.

TEACHING PLAN

The idea of Job's story dating back to some of the earliest moments of history is fascinating. Understanding where Job fits into the Bible's story is helpful, but it is comforting to know that, from the earliest days of the human race, we have wrestled with the idea of suffering.

Read Job 1:6-12,20-22.

Consider how God described Job. Job's faith in God had deeply matured his character. So, when Satan came in from roaming around—mostly likely to see what distress he could cause humanity—God was the one to point out Job's faithfulness. God brought Job to Satan's attention, not the other way around!

Satan's response was to claim Job was only faithful to God because God had been faithful to Job. If God were to withhold blessing from Job, Satan countered, he would curse God for His apparent faithlessness.

Satan—the great adversary—knows he cannot act without God's permission. This is not even up for debate, and Also, when God does permit Satan to act, His permission comes with limitations. Satan did not have authority to touch Job. (Later Satan would be allowed to touch Job, but not take his life.)

Activity

Brainstorm with students to come up with examples of suffering as they can, preferably real-to-life. For example: a family in a waiting room, a framed person in prison, a kid who's getting bullied, and so on. When they have finished the list, place them in groups and assign each group one of the examples of suffering. Instruct them to put on a skit showing that suffering and how a fellow Christian can step into that situation and serve the person who is hurting.

After they perform their skits, debrief what worked well and what didn't. It isn't always about being a hero or making things right; it's more about suffering with others so they don't feel alone, as in the beginning of Job's interaction with his friends.

- **We learn from Job's story that Satan can't do anything without God's permission. Why is this good news for us?**

Take a close look at Job's response to the suffering he experienced; it was not anger but faithful worship. Job recognized life and all of its good gifts originate in God. All the good things Job had leading up to that day were because of God's kind and gracious provision. The same Lord who had authority to give him what he had also maintained the authority to take it away. Knowing this, Job chose to trust.

- **When something goes wrong, what is your immediate reaction?**
- **What does our response to suffering reveal to others about our faith in God?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God draws near to comfort us when we suffer.

Job 2

When Satan's first attempt to cause Job to curse God by taking his family and possessions from him failed, God granted permission for Satan to try again—this time with permission to inflict great physical pain on Job (2:4-6). Even when Job's wife called on him to curse God and die, Job did not sin (2:9-10).

This is when Job's three friends—Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad—wandered onto the scene. After sitting with Job for a week saying nothing (2:13), Job broke the silence. The bulk of the Book of Job is a record of the lengthy conversation between the four men. The three friends' basic position was that Job must have done something wrong to deserve this great suffering and needed to repent. Job countered that he had done nothing wrong; these things had to be one enormous mistake or misunderstanding.

Job's friends' error stemmed from their incomplete view of suffering. They viewed suffering as the direct result of sin and blessing as the direct result of living rightly. So, they thought God punished those who did evil and rewarded those who did good.

Suffering can result from sin (consider the drunk driver who crashes his car and injures himself, having to walk with a limp for the rest of his life); it is too simplistic to say suffering *always* comes from wrongdoing. Not only does suffering come from living in fallen world, but suffering can also come from standing up for the gospel—a good thing indeed! In essence, Job's friends' thinking was small—they couldn't imagine how suffering might be used in a good way, to bring Job closer to the grace and mercy of God.

God wants us to have a better perspective. He wants us to think well about who He is and how He operates as the sovereign Ruler. For Job, this meant remembering the exalted nature of God in His fullness. Job was constantly pressing toward God's rule from the heavens. And, he was right to. God rules over creation from His throne in heaven.

99 Essential Doctrines *(p.48, DDG)*

God is Immanent

When we say that God is immanent, we mean that God is personable and relatable to those made in His image, while remaining completely distinct and unique from all of His creation. It means that God is not a distant deity (as imagined by the deist) who only sits on His heavenly throne with no interaction, but instead, He is a personal God who created people in His image to be in personal relationship with Him.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Job 9:14-16,32-35.

Even though Job initially responded in worship, the more he lived in his pain the more he missed and longed for the presence of God to make sense of his circumstances.

- **Job wanted to understand why He suffered. Do you think knowing the reason for our suffering helps?**

The text describes Job as being in such pain that he was ready to take God to court to plead his case. If only he were able to do that—to have a mediator who had God's ear, someone to bridge the impassable gap between the two of them—then, this misunderstanding could be cleared up and the pain would stop. But in resignation, Job declared, "I am on my own" (v. 35).

But God did not abandon Job. God was not distant. God was listening. For Job, the truth was contradictory to human experience. God felt far from Job, although God was still near to Him. God would eventually prove His presence to Job when He revealed Himself in great power. In time, there would be no doubt that God had not abandoned Job, just like He has not abandoned us in our time of need. We may lose our reputation, our health, or even the life of someone we love, but none of these realities change God's presence for His people. We know this because God would indeed answer Job's cry for a mediator in Christ. Jesus is our great Mediator who intercedes on our behalf and brought us to the Father through His suffering. And through the gift of the Holy Spirit, God walks with us in our suffering today.

- **What are some ways God has come near to you during your suffering?**
- **How encouraging is it to know God is not distant and detached from our suffering, but has suffered on our behalf in order to bring us to Himself?**

Read Job 42:1-6.

Job's last words before the end of this book of the Bible are in chapter 31. Before chapter 31, God spoke extensively, from a whirlwind, with only a brief few lines from Job in 40:3-5. God's words to Job seem rather raw, especially to a man who was suffering so greatly. In essence, the Creator invited Job to test the depth of human understanding against His own. Time and time again, God asked if Job had the depth of knowledge to understand the mysteries of creation and the created order.

Job remained silent throughout God's speech. Job was humbled before his Maker. Job was reminded of God's sovereignty and divine presence over the world, which is precisely what Job's heart needed. Though God's words may have initially stung, they were the path to reassuring Job of what he needed to remember most—especially when the world seemed to be falling apart around him. God is present. God is active. God is faithful. Job didn't need an explanation from God in his time of suffering; he needed God Himself.

- **How has the story of Job connected with you on a personal level?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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Job 42:1-6.

God's message and presence demanded a response from Job. Job begged for a personal encounter with the Lord and it had happened. What was he supposed to do next?

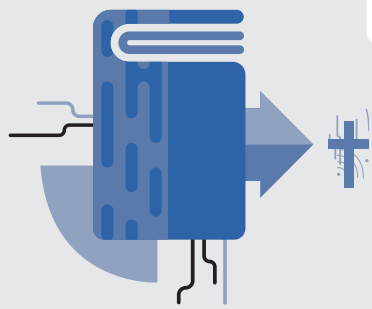
First, Job acknowledged God's sovereignty. His initial words were, "I know that you can do anything and no plan of yours can be thwarted" (42:2). Rather than dwelling an answer for his grief, Job to focused on God's authority instead. An amazing turn took place in Job's heart. He moved from demanding an answer about earthly things to acknowledging God's control over eternal things.

Humility was the second component to Job's response. His speeches were an overreach on every account. The personal demands for the God of the universe to give an accounting to a mere mortal were too much. Rather than shake his fist at God or demand some answer, Job humbled his heart. He admitted he spoke about things that he didn't understand (Job 42:3). Our reply to suffering is often based in the emotion of the moment. We feel loss so we want someone to restore. We feel pain so we want someone to offer relief. We feel slighted so we want someone to bring justice. Job discovered that all he needed was to be silent before the God of the universe. The presence of the Creator filled every void suffering had brought into his life. This is what Job needed most and what we need as well.

In the end, God used Job's suffering to draw him closer to Himself. We cannot miss this: Job did not draw closer to God despite his pain; he drew closer to God through his pain. The same is true for us. Jesus has told us that we will be persecuted—we will endure hardship and suffer—for Him (Matt. 10:22). And it is this very adversity that will draw us closer to Him as we identify with Him through our suffering (Col. 1:24). There is beauty alongside the pain in our suffering for this reason: It brings us closer to our Savior. When we experience God's presence in the midst of severe pain, it is a faith-expanding adventure.

(p. 50, DDG) Christ Connection

Job wanted a mediator when he suffered—someone to bring him and God together. We know there is one who stands between God and man and pleads for us as a man pleads for his friends. Jesus Christ is that man; He is that friend. He said there is no greater love than to give up your life for your friend (John 15:13).



SUFFERING AND GOD'S PRESENCE

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JESUS CONNECTION

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LIFEWISE QUALITY

CONTENTMENT – Being satisfied with what God has given and not desiring anything more.

HEAD

How do we see Job respond to God in his suffering? How does God respond to Job's questions?

Many times, we won't know why we are suffering. Does the fact that we don't know the reason prove that there is no reason at all? Explain.

HEART

List some ways you have typically responded to suffering or hard times in your own life. Not every response we have to suffering is healthy or positive. What are some healthy and helpful responses we can use when suffering comes?

Choosing contentment is not easy, but it can be learned. The Bible tells us that God knows what we need (Matthew 6:32) and will supply everything we need (Psalms 23:1; Philippians 4:19). Why would focusing on those promises, instead of whatever we think we need, help us be content?

HANDS

Sometimes enduring suffering is easier when someone walks with us. Job found out that God had never left him in his suffering. We can stand with others, too. Think of someone you know who is suffering or going through a tough time in their life. Write out a prayer to God on their behalf. Determine how you will encourage that person this week. (*Examples*: call them, help them with a practical task or chore, take them cookies, send them the prayer you wrote out on their behalf, invite them to church, etc).